

**PERCEPTIONS OF CYBERBULLYING FROM SECONDARY SCHOOL  
ADMINISTRATORS IN TEXAS**

A Dissertation

by

KRIS DOREEN MITZNER

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2011

Major Subject: Educational Administration

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## **ABSTRACT**

Perceptions of Cyberbullying from Secondary School Administrators in Texas.

(December 2011)

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Co-Chairs of Advisory Committee: Dr. Virginia Collier  
Dr. James Scheurich

This mixed method study examined perceptions and experiences of secondary school administrators in Texas regarding cyberbullying. It was designed to gather quantitative information related to cyberbullying in secondary school campuses in Texas as well as descriptive details from the qualitative portion of the survey and follow up interviews.

Data were collected from an electronic survey and follow up interviews. The results were analyzed statistically and for emerging themes. Six themes emerged from the qualitative survey questions and interviews. These themes were: 1) common definitions and descriptions, 2) target on individuals, 3) effect on school climate, 4) speed of replication and permanence of information, 5) difference between public and private information, and 6) need for education.

The perception from secondary school administrators was that cyberbullying incidents are appearing in the majority of secondary schools in Texas and it is important for administrators to understand and respond to cyberbullying.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you have imagined.”

-Henry David Thoreau

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Technology has transformed human communication. The rapid emergence of digital transmission of voice, text, and graphic data over the past 2 decades has altered the way students communicate; digital technology allows ready access to e-mail, the Internet (including social networking websites), instant messages, and text messaging. Inevitably, along with the positive aspects of these communication media, negative aspects have also emerged. One of these is cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying is a type of harassment defined by Patchin and Hinduja (2006) as willful and repeated harm inflicted through a medium of electronic text or images, and by Raskausas and Stoltz (2007) as a means of bullying in which peers use technological communications to humiliate, harass, intimidate, threaten, or slander others. Research suggests that cyberbullying is relatively common, with the rates of cyberbullying victimization of adolescents ranging from approximately 10% to 35% of the population with access to this technology (Agatson, Kowalski, & Limber, 2007; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Kowalski & Limber 2007; Li, 2007a, 2007b; Williams & Guerra, 2007).

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This dissertation follows the style of *Educational Administration Quarterly*.

Cyberbullying occurs via the use of cellular phones or computers (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). The bully can send text messages, pictures, or videos to the victim or others using a cellular phone. Using a computer, a bully can employ e-mail, instant messaging, or social networking sites to send slanderous messages or post obscene or hurtful content (Willard, 2007).

Although the harassment of the bully remains hurtful, cyberbullying differs from other traditional forms of bullying because aggressors are physically separated from their victims and from the impact of their actions (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). This distancing of the victim and the bully occurs because cyberbullying is inflicted using the relative anonymity of cyberspace. When a cyberbully delivers an insult to his or her victim or posts hurtful or slanderous material to a larger audience via one of these digital media, the bully often perceives the act as anonymous. Moreover, unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying is far reaching and almost instantaneous; it can occur at any time and it can be distributed to an entire online community. Limited adult supervision increases opportunities for deviant behavior such as cyberbullying in adolescents' use of wireless and internet communications (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006).

As use of the Internet increased, scholars became aware of the potential for cyberbullying. In a letter to the editor in the *Journal of American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, Jerome and Segal (2003) noted the lack of academic research on cyberbullying. Since their warning, several studies have been conducted to assess students' perspectives on cyberbullying (Agatston et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2008; Varjas, Henrich, & Meyers, 2009). Researchers have also been encouraged to gather

input on cyberbullying from teachers, administrators, and parents. These adults have witnessed the effects of cyberbullying, and their insights could add substantially to the understanding of this issue (Varjas et al., 2009). As such, the current study focused on learning about the experiences and perceptions of secondary school administrators in Texas regarding student cyberbullying as well as cyberbullying against faculty and staff.

School administrators have dealt with bullying of one student by another throughout the history of schools, but the act of bullying in school was based on the close proximity of the harasser and the victim. The most common location for traditional bullying was on the school grounds. Though traditional bullying still exists, it is no longer the only way a victim can be harassed. Today's bullies can use technology media such as cell phones and the computer to bully others, and the bullying generally extends beyond the school grounds via text messaging, e-mails, and social networking sites (Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Wolak, 2000; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). To serve their student populations effectively, school administrators must become more knowledgeable about cyberbullying. The problem addressed in this research is the growing issue of cyberbullying in today's public schools and the unknown knowledge level of the administrators responsible for addressing this new form of bullying.

To address the problem, a survey methodology was designed and used to gather data from Texas secondary school administrators by asking participants to recall and relate their experiences with cyberbullying via an electronic questionnaire for this study. The survey was extended by personal interviews with a sampling of the participants.

This study was designed to answer the research question, “What are the perceptions and experiences of secondary school administrators in Texas regarding cyberbullying?” The methodology of this study is explained in Chapter III.

Secondary school administrators in the state of Texas who were members of the Texas Association of Secondary School Principals (TASSP) comprised the sample frame for this study. The online survey instrument was developed by the researcher and pilot tested by five administrators prior to distribution. The purpose of the survey was to gather the perceptions of secondary school administrators regarding cyberbullying. The survey was in a multiple-choice and short-answer format. Using the electronic survey service Survey Monkey, the instrument was delivered electronically via e-mail along with a link to an information sheet about the research. A copy of the survey may be found in Appendix A. The distribution of the survey link to secondary school administrators who are members of TASSP occurred during June 2009. Survey participants completed the survey online, and the researcher analyzed the data. The data gathered were examined using quantitative analysis procedures for the multiple-choice questions. Qualitative analysis procedures were utilized for the open-ended questions.

The researcher analyzed the quantitative data using descriptive statistic techniques outlined in *Educational Research: An Introduction* by Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996). The quantitative data collected with the survey were analyzed with a statistical analysis computer software program on a personal computer. Descriptive analyses using standard statistical methods were conducted. Anonymity was maintained unless the respondents agreed to provide their contact information for a follow-up phone interview.

Thirty-one interviewees expressed an interest in a follow-up phone interview. All 31 were sent an e-mail invitation to coordinate the interview. Six of those interviewees participated in the follow-up interviews. These interviews were semistructured and were audiotaped. Follow-up e-mails or phone calls were conducted for clarification purposes. The intent of these interviews was to provide a context for understanding the quantitative findings gleaned from the perceptions of administrators surveyed. Data gathered in the interviews were separated into units, categorized, and coded for emerging themes and subthemes. An analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data followed the principles outlined in *Naturalistic Inquiry* by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The interviews also provided anecdotal data that illustrated the depth and complexity of the various issues embodied by the term *cyberbullying*.

The definitions used by the researcher are critical to understanding the study and its methodology. These include the following key terms:

*Bullying*: An aggressive behavior or intentional harm by one person or a group carried out repeatedly and over time that involves a power differential.

*Cyberbullying*: Willful and repeated harm in which peers use technological communications to humiliate, harass, intimidate, threaten, or slander others.

*Administrator*: For the purposes of this study, an administrator is defined as a school official who was certified as a principal by the Texas State Board of Educators and was a member of TASSP in June 2009.

These definitions point to limitations of the study. The sole inclusion of participants who were members of the TASSP and responded to the survey represents

the main limitation. Although TASSP is a statewide organization with members from every size and type of district in the state, participation was offered but not mandated. It may be assumed that those who chose to respond were administrators with an interest in or, at a minimum, an awareness of the issue of cyberbullying. While there are likely many areas of the United States in which the level of understanding of cyberbullying would be similar to those of the participating TASSP members, caution should be utilized in applying these findings to populations in which there is reason to believe conditions would be significantly different.

The present study is significant because it is crucial for school administrators to understand and recognize cyberbullying and formulate ways to effectively deal with it. This study provided information regarding the current state of administrators' perceptions and experiences. School districts can also use information from this study to generate staff development opportunities to assist school leaders, teachers, and other personnel in addressing cyberbullying. In addition, the results of this research could be used to formulate school and district policies regarding cyberbullying.

Finally, an overview of the organization of the study is needed. There are six chapters in the study. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter II is a review of the literature on traditional bullying and the emergence of cyberbullying. Chapter III explains the methodology of the research; Chapter IV contains the quantitative research findings and the analysis of those findings. Chapter V presents the qualitative results. The study concludes with Chapter VI, a compilation of the researcher's discussion of the results, conclusions, and recommendations for further study.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

According to the 2006 *United Nations World Report on Violence Against Children*, bullying is a worldwide problem (Pinheiro, 2006). However, a majority of the research has taken place only in the industrialized world. Research on bullying in schools essentially emerged from the work of Dan Olweus in Scandinavia (1978). After three students in Norway committed suicide because of bullying, the Norwegian government commissioned him to study the phenomenon (Olweus, 1993). He discovered that approximately 20% of children surveyed in Norway and Sweden had received some form of bullying in school. Since this seminal work, many other research studies on bullying in schools have been conducted (Bansel, Davies, Laws, & Linnell, 2009; Demaray & Malecki, 2003; Espelage & Swearer, 2004; Smith & Sharp, 1994). These studies have helped develop a better understanding of the prevalence, causes, and prevention of bullying.

As researchers across the world began to look at the phenomenon of bullying in schools, the frequency and impact of bullying was documented in more detail. Stephenson and Smith (1989) reported that approximately 23% of adolescents surveyed experienced bullying, whereas Mynard, Joseph, and Alexander (2000) found 40% of adolescents in the United Kingdom were bullied at some time during their schooling. In an Australian study by Rigby (1997), one in six children reported being bullied at least once a week. Another study of Finnish teens found that depression and suicidal ideation

are strongly linked to either being bullied or acting as a bully (Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpela, Marttunen, Rimpela, & Rantanen, 1999). A British study of middle school students indicated victims of bullying reported feeling unhappy and having few good friends (Boulton & Underwood, 1992). The results of these varied research studies on bullying in schools helped focus attention on the seriousness of the issue.

In the United States, preliminary research was also conducted to examine the prevalence of bullying in schools. A nationally representative study by Nansel et al. (2001) found that 11% of survey respondents were victims of bullying. Correspondingly, DeVoe et al. (2002) reported that 8% of students stated they had been bullied at school in the last 6 months. This number represented a 5% increase over statistics taken by the U.S. Department of Justice in 1999 (Kaufman et al., 1999). Another study in the United States also found that bullying at school is a common occurrence for many children (Whitney & Smith, 1993). At least 5% of middle school students are bullied at school every day (Cunningham, 2007; Demaray & Malecki, 2003), and additional studies estimate that number may be higher (Nansel, Overpeck, Haynie, Ruan, & Scheidt, 2003; Seals & Young, 2003). Cohn and Canter (2003) reported that bullying was the most common form of violence in our society, with between 15% and 30% of students being bullies or victims. A study in the Midwest reported that 72% of female students and 81% of male students surveyed felt they had experienced bullying at some point in their student careers (Hoover, R. Oliver, & Hazler, 1992).



In the 1990s, the United States experienced an increase in school shootings, the most notable being the incident at Columbine High School. In examining these school shooting episodes, Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, and Modzeleski (2002) and Viadero (2003) found that in over two thirds of the incidents, the perpetrators felt bullied or threatened at their school prior to the incident. They also discovered that revenge for bullying motivated more than half of the occurrences. In most of these situations, the school shooters resorted to violence only after they felt that schools failed to intervene on their behalf. In response to this increase in school shootings, research studies, policies, and prevention programs on bullying multiplied.

### **Definitions and Types of Bullying**

As research studies on bullying in schools increased, researchers attempted to define and stratify the types of bullying experienced by students. These definitions play a role in the identification of bullying, and several definitions for bullying exist in the literature. Bullying is most frequently defined as a subset of aggression (Dodge, 1991; Olweus, 1993). The following definitions are commonly found in the literature:

1. A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students (Olweus, 1993, p. 9).
2. By definition, an act of bullying involves an intention to harm and a power differential between the bully and target. This power differential separates bullying from reciprocal aggressive acts (Nansel et al., 2003, p. 348).

3. Bullying is a specific type of aggression in which (a) the behavior is intended to harm or disturb, (b) the behavior occurs repeatedly over time, and (c) there is an imbalance of power, with a more powerful person or group attacking a less powerful one. This asymmetry of power may be physical or psychological, and the aggressive behavior may be verbal (e.g., name-calling, threats), physical (e.g., hitting), or psychological (e.g., rumors, shunning, or exclusion; Nansel et al., 2001, p. 2094).

4. Bullying is repeated acts of aggression by individuals who have more power than their victims (Dillon & Lash, 2005, p. 34).

Although researchers may interpret the definition of bullying differently, the commonalities are that the behavior is intentional, repetitive, violent, or aggressive and includes a power differential.

Once researchers formulated definitions of bullying, they categorized the behaviors into types of bullying. Several studies described direct and indirect forms of bullying (Besag, 1989; Ericson, 2001; Olweus, 1978). Direct bullying includes behaviors such as hitting, pushing, punching, hair pulling, tripping, and pinching, or language that is intended to assault, tease, or ridicule (Campbell, 2005; Slee & Rigby, 1993). This type of physical bullying ranges from shoving to severe beatings (Dussich & Maekoya, 2007). Flicking rubber bands at another person or restricting movement by tying the student to something also constitute direct bullying. Sometimes direct bullying becomes a form of sexual harassment—for example, when members of the opposite sex pull down shorts or snap bras. In contrast, indirect bullying involves more subtle,

manipulative activities such as gossip, rumor spreading, and social exclusion, and it causes damage to interpersonal relationships (Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001; Simmons, 2003).

The differences between direct bullying (e.g., kicking, hitting, and threatening) and indirect bullying (e.g., spreading rumors and imposing social isolation) were explained by Feshbach (1969). A Finnish group of researchers examined indirect aggression and found that this type of bullying was difficult to detect (i.e., Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, & Peltonen, 1988). Researchers have continued to grapple with the process of defining and identifying indirect bullying since these preliminary studies were completed.

Within the category of indirect bullying there are typically two subdivisions, relational and social. Several types of indirect bullying are called relational bullying because the goal is to damage a relationship. Crick and Grotpeter (1995, 1996) described relational aggression as a way to use relationships as a means to harm. Spreading rumors about a peer to retaliate for not following the group is an example of relational bullying. Students who engage in gossiping and manipulation, as well as behaviors that seek to harm people by attacking their social reputations, are engaging in types of relational bullying. Accordingly, indirect bullying, both relational and social, can affect emotional health and belonging within a peer group. This type of bullying is particularly damaging to adolescents because peer relations are crucial and are most influential during this developmental stage (S. J. Yoon, Barton, & Taiariol, 2004).

### **Effects of Bullying**

Bullying causes physical, emotional, and behavioral consequences that impact both the victim and the bully (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995, 1996; Hoover et al., 1992; Sharp, 1995, 1996). Consequences of physical bullying can often be seen by others; parents and teachers may notice bruises and scratches. However, injuries from verbal and indirect bullying may be difficult to discover. Indirect bullying may not leave physical scars, but it often creates social and emotional wounds that are difficult to detect.

Researchers agree that bullying from peers has emotional consequences (Hawker & Boulton, 2000; O'Moore & Kirkham, 2001). Students who are chronically teased and bullied often suffer from low self-esteem and depression (Bernstein & Watson, 1997; Craig, 1998; Crick, Nelson, Morales, Cullerton-Sen, & Hickman, 2001; Hodges & Perry, 1996; Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2001; Olweus 1993; Rigby & Slee, 1993; Slee, 1995). Both low self-esteem and depression can lead to victims of indirect bullying reporting higher levels of loneliness and a lack of self-worth (Prinstein et al., 2001). Studies have found that children who are targets of relational bullying tend to be more depressed and experience suicidal thoughts (Rigby, 1996). Children who are chronically bullied experience an ongoing cycle of fear as well as depression (Bernstein & Watson, 1997). For example, the findings of a study of seventh- and eighth-grade students by Seals and Young (2003) corresponded with the earlier findings of several others (e.g., Duncan, 1999; Slee, 1995; Tritt & Duncan, 1997) that indicated that victims of bullying

were more depressed than students not involved in bullying or even the students doing the bullying.

Bullying in schools also has behavioral consequences for the victim. Students who are bullied at school often try to avoid the unhealthy environment, and frequently have numerous tardies, truancies, and even visits to the clinic. For instance, a study by Sharp (1995) found that 20% of bullied students admitted that they would rather be truant than be bullied. Truancy often leads to other issues such as delinquency and dropping out of school (Nansel et al., 2001). Behavioral consequences such as vandalism, drug use, and fighting have also been connected to bullying (Loeber & Dishion, 1984; Olweus, Limber, & Mihalic, 1999; Rigby, 2003; Tattum, 1989).

### **Gender Differences in Bullying Research**

Research about bullying in schools in the late 1990s and early 2000s indicated that boys were more involved in bullying than girls (Borg, 1999; Crick & Grotpeter, 1996; Espelage, Bosworth, Simon, 2000; Seals & Young, 2003). However, when the research was examined more closely, the data revealed not only trends in types of bullying but also definite differences between the genders. Bullying in schools differs for males and females as they experience different types and rates of bullying. Interestingly, no significant difference in verbal bullying exists between males and females (Mynard & Joseph, 2000). In fact, name-calling was found to be the most prevalent form of bullying in both sexes (Seals & Young, 2003; Shakeshaft et al., 1997).

Even though there are commonalities between genders with respect to verbal bullying, males tend to be more involved in physical and direct bullying (Mynard & Joseph, 2000; Nansel et al., 2001; Olweus, 1993; Seals & Young, 2003), whereas females tend to be more involved in relational and indirect bullying (Harris & Petrie, 2003; Hoover et al., 1992; Mynard & Joseph, 2000; Nansel et al., 2001; Whitney & Smith, 1993). For example, in a study in an Italian middle school (Baldry, 1998), males reported threats, physical harm, rejection, and name-calling as the most common forms of bullying, whereas females most commonly reported name-calling, teasing, rumors, rejection, and the taking of personal belongings. Females also reported more indirect forms of bullying such as deliberate social exclusion or rumor spreading (Crick, Casas, & Ku, 1999; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Nansel et al., 2001), with gossip and slander being the primary means girls use to harass and humiliate each other (Olweus, 1993).

Additionally, these types of relational aggression are the most common types of bullying among middle school girls (De Alameida, 1999; Vail, 2002). They tend to result in more negative outcomes for girls because girls place a higher value on intimacy (Tannen, 1990). For instance, Gilligan (1982) found that females tend to be more relationship oriented than males during adolescence. Also, females report more indirect forms of bullying such as deliberate social exclusion with gossip, slander, and spreading rumors as the primary means of harassment and humiliation (Nansel et al., 2001; Olweus, 1993). Furthermore, due to the importance that females place on social relationships, girls tend to choose their victims because of emotional instability, attractiveness, weight, or academic standing (Harris & Petrie, 2003). For example, in a

qualitative study of adolescent females, respondents reported that girls bullied a particular victim because they were competing for social status, engaging in fun, or deflecting negative attention (Crothers, Field, & Kohlberg, 2005). Further, Raskauskas and Stoltz (2004) found that this practice is more common among girls than boys and that this form of aggression is most damaging to girls' friendships (Goldstein & Tisak, 2004).

### **Bullying and Age**

Along with differences according to gender, bullying occurs across all age groups but seems to vary according to age. Many elementary students report being bullied at school, with studies showing that bullying starts as early as kindergarten (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996; Moeller, 2001). The rates and incidents of bullying vary greatly between studies depending upon how the bullying was measured and the way the research was designed (Bradshaw, Sawyer, & O'Brennan, 2007; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996). However, students who bully in elementary school tend to continue in middle school and high school (Harachi et al., 2006; Olweus 1993).

In the study by Nansel et al. (2001), bullying occurred most frequently in sixth through eighth grade. Other researchers suggested that bullying levels peak at the beginning of middle school (S. L. Brown, Birch, & Kancherla, 2005; Goddard 2008; Hoover et al., 1992; Pellegrini & Bartini, 2001; Pellegrini & Long, 2002; Smith, Madsen, & Moody, 1999). Although the overall rates of bullying decrease during high school, incidents of bullying continue to exist (Gruber & Fineran, 2007).

Bullying also tends to escalate during transitions from one school to another, particularly the transition from elementary to middle school (Pellegrini & Bartini, 2001; Pellegrini & Long, 2002). Eccles and Midgley (1989) studied this phenomenon in regard to the social development of adolescents. Aggression has been recognized as a means of establishing dominance among peers, and developmental psychologists have concluded that dominance results in greater access to resources and control over others (Bjorklund & Pellegrini, 2002). Some researchers, such as Milsom and Gallo (2006) and Pellegrini (2002), have theorized that this increase may be attributed to students positioning for their roles in a new social environment. The need for dominance and control provides insight as to why bullying appears to fluctuate over the course of the school years.

### **School Climate**

School climate is defined by the Center for Social and Emotional Education (2007) as the quality and character of school life. A school's climate is determined by the experience of school life and takes into account norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationship, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures. Over the last 3 decades, a growing body of research has established the importance of school climate (Cohen, Pickeral, & McCloskey, 2008). A positive school climate supports learning (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). When there is a positive school climate, incidents of bullying are reduced. It is important to develop a positive school climate (Sprague & Walker, 2005). A school's climate affects students' psychosocial and



academic functioning (Baker, 1998a; Shouse, 1996; Solomon, Watson, Battistich, Shaps, & Delucchi, 1996), and it can influence students' tendencies to engage in aggressive behaviors (Baker, 1998b). Bullying has a negative impact on the school climate (Olweus, 1993; Roberts & Coursol, 1996). When the school's staff members tolerate or ignore bullying behaviors, they indirectly encourage acceptance of this behavior (R. Oliver, Hoover, & Hazler, 1994). If victims of bullying believe the situation is going unnoticed in their school environment, they are less likely to feel safe (Casey-Cannon, Hayward, & Gowen, 2001; J. Yoon & Kerber, 2003). Therefore, establishing a positive school climate is an essential element of good classroom management and bullying prevention (Aspy & Roebuck, 1977; Olweus, 1993; Pianta, 1999).

Studies have found that areas within a school that have less supervision, such as playgrounds, locker rooms, and cafeterias, tend to demonstrate an increased prevalence of bullying behaviors (Craig & Pepler, 1997). Astor, Meyer, and Pitner (2001) developed a mapping procedure to identify the areas within a school that exhibit the most victimization. Interestingly, students in all schools in their study perceived places that lack adult supervision as unsafe.

Middle school students also reported feeling less safe and unsure about which adults they could go to for help (Astor et al., 2001). Clarke and Kiselica (1997) indicated that middle school students tended not to report bullying behaviors because they did not believe that reporting the behaviors would solve the situation. The findings of C. Oliver and Candappa (2007) confirmed results of other studies indicating that

children often do not tell adults about their bullying experiences (La Fontaine, 1991; Macleod & Morris, 1996; Smith & Shu, 2000).

As bullying behaviors vary from classroom to classroom (Henry et al., 2000), Rowan (2007) suggested there is also a strong link between proficiency in classroom management and the absence of bullying. Teachers have been identified as key agents of change in bullying prevention (Kallestad & Olweus, 2003; Orpinas, Horne, & Staniszewski, 2003), and teachers who manage their classrooms with consistency while maintaining a nurturing environment allow fewer opportunities for bullying to occur (Scarpaci, 2007). Teachers may foster bullying when they fail to either promote respectful interactions among students or address bullying behaviors (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Consequently, classroom environments play critical roles in the maintenance or reduction of students' bullying behaviors (Barth, Dane, Dunlap, Lochman, & Wells, 2004; Song & Swearer, 2002). While maintaining a classroom that nurtures students, a teacher can raise students' awareness of teasing and harassment by using reflective activities such as focusing on acceptable behavior of characters when discussing literature (Shakeshaft et al., 1997).

The results of a study by Ma (2002) suggested that schools with less bullying are characterized by positive disciplinary actions, strong parental involvement, and high academic standards. In fact, a Canadian study found that bullying stopped in 57% of cases where bystanders intervened (Rigby, 2003). Strong leadership, a caring school climate, and clear, consistently enforced policies can reduce the incidence and severity of violence in schools (Pineiro, 2006).

### **Leadership and Bullying**

The principal plays a vital role in the prevention of bullying. Rigby (1996) found that a principal's leadership style and level of commitment, along with attitudes and beliefs of parents and teachers, help reduce bullying. Environmental factors such as attitudes, behaviors, and routines of teachers and principals also play a crucial role in determining the extent to which bullying problems will occur in a classroom or school (Olweus, 2003). Harris and Petrie (2003) noted that schools characterized as safe are typically led by principals who foster a caring atmosphere based on principles of belonging. A previous study in Texas that explored middle school principals' perceptions of bullying concluded that to prevent bullying, campus leaders need to be more aware of bullying behaviors and where they occur on campus (Harris & Hathorn, 2006). In addition to the classroom environment, a sense of belonging to a supportive school community was associated with emotional well-being, intrinsic motivation, prosocial behavior, commitment to school, and academic engagement achievement (Osterman, 2002). When students lack support from home, peers, and the community, personal support for learning from teachers and principals becomes more important (Lee, Smith, Perry, & Smylie, 1999). Perceived support from a teacher is one of the greatest influences on academic achievement, even after controlling for academic engagement (Chen, 2005).

### **Emergence of Cyberbullying**

With the development of electronic transmission of voice, text, and graphic data, a dramatic shift in traditional forms of bullying emerged. Adolescents are increasingly dependent on electronic communication tools such as the Internet and cellular phones. For example, 71% of adolescents owned a cellular phone in 2008 (Lenhart, 2009). Adolescents characterize themselves as highly dependent on technology for interaction and report spending a large portion of their free time using cell phones or computers (Mishna, Saini, & Solomon, 2009). Social networking sites, texting, and e-mail are becoming the dominant means and methods through which personal communication takes place. This adolescent generation is the first to have grown up in a society where the Internet is an important part of daily life (I. R. Berson, Berson, & Ferron, 2002). As a result, adolescents today, termed digital natives, have spent their entire lives immersed in all the toys and tools of the digital age (Prensky, 2001). In contrast, digital immigrants (such as the parents) were not born into a digital world, but became users of the technology later in life. Most adolescents access the Internet daily, using it to locate information ranging from sports to trivia to news. In addition, they search for information online for legitimate uses such as research assignments or to add to their knowledge and communicate with others via digital devices.

Fodeman and Monroe (2009) found that socializing is the greatest motivating factor for adolescent use of technology. The desire to socialize via these technology devices has greatly impacted e-mail, instant messaging, and social networking sites. Social networking sites are popular with adolescents because they combine the features

of profiles, websites, chat, discussion groups, and messaging (Mason, 2008). Table 1 shows various digital communication activities of adolescents. Communicating with others via digital technologies has become a cultural norm.

Table 1

*Digital Communication Activities of Adolescents*

activity	teens participating in activity
Send text messages daily	54%
Call on cell phone daily	38%
Talk on landline daily	30%
Spend time with friends in person daily outside of school	33%
Send messages via social networks daily	25%
IM daily	24%
Send e-mail daily	11%

Adapted from “Teens and Mobile Phones,” by A. Lenhart, R. R. Ling, S. Campbell, and K. Purcell, April 20, 2010 by Pew Internet & American Life Project.  
 $N = 800$  and margin of error  $\pm 4\%$  based on all teens 12-17.

Digital tools can provide many forms of positive interaction—for example, raising money for humanitarian efforts or joining together to promote a beneficial organization such as the American Heart Association. They also supply sources of entertainment, easy access to information, and speedy communication with others. Online communication can even provide an avenue for expressing sentiments in a healthy manner or engaging in critical thinking (M. J. Berson, 2000). Electronic

communication often reflects and builds prosocial behavior as participants develop and sustain online relationships (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). By participating in groups or supporting and defending causes on social networking sites, adolescents develop critical thinking and benevolence for others.

Although these digital communication devices do have many positive aspects, they can also be misused (Beran & Li, 2005; Keith & Martin, 2005; Willard, 2006). This transformation in communication has resulted in instances of bullying that are no longer restricted to face-to-face situations. The increased accessibility to digital technology tools has established a new form of bullying termed cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is a type of harassment defined by Patchin and Hinduja (2006) as willful and repeated harm inflicted through the medium of electronic text or images. Raskauskas and Stoltz (2007) defined cyberbullying as a means of bullying in which peers use technological communications to humiliate, harass, intimidate, threaten, or slander others. Media reports show that cyberbullies use text messaging, e-mails, and websites to harass peers (I. R. Berson et al., 2002; Tench, 2003). Furthermore, cyberbullying has spread quickly and seems to be prevalent in the adolescent segment of the American population (Beran & Li, 2005).

Research suggests that a significant percentage of adolescents experience cyberbullying. In most studies, the rates of cyberbullying for adolescents range from approximately 10% to 35% (Agatson et al., 2007; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Li, 2007a, 2007b; Williams & Guerra, 2007). In a study conducted by Li (2006), researchers found that close to half of the 264 seventh-grade to ninth-grade

students studied reported being cyberbullied. Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) conducted telephone surveys of 1,498 Internet users between the ages of 10 and 17 and their parents. They found that 10% of the youth respondents reported being either on the giving or receiving end of online aggressive acts during the previous year. Patchin and Hinduja (2006) studied 384 adolescents and their Internet experiences with online bullying. More than 20% reported being victimized online, almost 11% admitted to cyberbullying others, and more than 47% said they had witnessed online bullying.

In preliminary findings, researchers concluded that certain characteristics are unique to cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is different from the other forms of bullying because the aggressors are separated from their victims—that is, they are not in the physical presence of each other—and from the impact of their actions (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). In the past, traditional bullying required a physical location for harm to take place. Thus, the person perpetrating cyberbullying may be unaffected by the consequences of his or her actions because of the lack of direct feedback from the victim. In addition, there may be fewer opportunities for empathy and bystander intervention (Slonje & Smith, 2008).

In a study by Mishna et al. (2009), participants generally described cyberbullying as an anonymous attack with profound effects. Because perpetrators were not face-to-face with the victim, individuals behaved in more aggressive ways (Keith & Martin, 2005; Sparling, 2004). This perceived anonymity is unique to cyberbullying. The literature on cyberbullying discusses how the anonymous perception of digital communication enables individuals to act in inappropriate ways (Hinduja & Patchin,

2009; Shariff, 2009). The perception and feeling of invisibility eliminates concerns of detection and punishment and creates a disinhibition effect (Suler, 2004). This type of anonymous communication makes detection difficult and may encourage deviant behavior by averting embarrassment and responsibility (Teich, Frankel, Kling, & Lee, 1999).

With cyberbullying, the digital transmission of text and image has allowed the bullying to transcend time and place, often without consequence for the bully (Finkelhor et al., 2000; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Cyberbullying can reach a large audience within a peer group very quickly (Slonje & Smith, 2008), and it can be directed at a victim 24 hours a day, humiliating the victim in a worldwide venue, the Internet (Stover, 2006). The Pew Internet and American Life research project found that 87% of American adolescents have some digital means of contacting others at almost all times (Lenhart, Madden, & Hitlin, 2005). As a result, unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying can occur at any time and can be distributed to an entire online community. Because cyberbullying can also be distributed quickly to a wide audience, it can heighten children's and adolescents' vulnerability and affect the everyday reality that students experience elsewhere (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). It is this relentless attribute of cyberbullying that often makes it even more inescapable for the victim.

Due to the anonymous nature of some digital communication, attempts to reduce the behavior are complicated. As teens spend time online or in digital communication, they become immersed in an environment that lacks supervision from parents and other significant adults (Lebo, 2001). The lack of supervision makes cyberspace an



environment favorable to deviant behavior (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). All participants in the study by Mishna et al. (2009) stated that children and adolescents would not approach their parents about experiencing cyberbullying. The primary reason was fear that parents would remove Internet or cell phone privileges in order to protect their children (Agatston et al., 2007). As a result, when children and adolescents experience cyberbullying, they may not choose to seek help.

The potential proliferation of the Internet as a vehicle for bullying was recognized by Jerome and Segal (2003) in a letter to the editor published in the *Journal of American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*. In their letter, they noted the lack of academic research on cyberbullying. In response to this call for research, several studies have been conducted on students' perspectives of cyberbullying (Agatston et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2008; Varjas et al., 2009).

Agatston et al. (2007) stated in their findings that children, parents, and school personnel need to become more aware of what cyberbullying is, know how to prevent it, and learn how to address it. The Pew Internet and American Life Project also found that one third of teens surveyed had been cyberbullied (Lenhart, 2007). An online survey from the *Journal of School Health* stated that 72% of respondents reported at least one cyberbullying incident, and 90% of those student respondents did not tell any adult about it (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). The findings of these research studies support the view that cyberbullying is a significant problem for adolescents on and off school grounds (Hoover & Olsen, 2001), and the need exists for school personnel to intervene in this type of aggression (Li, 2006; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Varjas et al. (2009), among

others, have suggested gathering data regarding cyberbullying from teachers, administrators, and parents. These adults witness the effects of cyberbullying and could add substantially to the understanding of this issue (Varjas et al., 2009).

There is a gap, then, in the literature on administrators' perceptions of cyberbullying. Many studies have focused on the experiences and perceptions of students regarding cyberbullying in the past few years, but research studies on administrators' perspectives are lacking. School administrators are trained to design, implement, and evaluate programs within the school. They work with the entire school population and should be aware of school climate concerns such as cyberbullying. In addition, because school administrators have a supervisory role over teachers and students, they may also provide information about cyberbullying in both populations. Given the potential negative impact of cyberbullying on the school environment and the lack of studies involving school administrators, this research study was designed to gather data on secondary school administrators' perceptions and understanding of cyberbullying. It should be noted that this study asked respondents to address cyberbullying of teachers and staff as well as students. However, research studies about cyberbullying directed toward faculty and staff members could not be located in the literature.

### **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter explains the methodology and process used in examining perceptions and experiences of secondary school administrators in Texas regarding cyberbullying. Through electronic questionnaires and phone interviews, this study not only collected data on administrators' perceptions and experiences of cyberbullying, but also gathered demographic data to compare those experiences among participants. The perceptions and experiences were examined to draw conclusions about the quantitative and qualitative data.

#### **Population**

Participants in this study included a sample of Texas secondary school administrators from TASSP. At the time of the e-mail solicitation, the membership of TASSP, which also includes secondary school administrators (e.g., retired school administrators and central office representatives), was 5,314. TASSP membership is available to anyone interested in secondary school administration. The organization also provides honorary memberships to individuals who are in powerful positions in the state such as State Board of Education members. According to TASSP's mission statement, the goal of the organization is to give a voice to secondary school administrators and to enhance their ability to transform schools into communities of learning by establishing vital relationships among principals and providing a forum for research and best

practices in secondary schools (Texas Association of Secondary School Principals, 2011). The result is a membership that extends beyond secondary school administrators. Therefore, the return rate is not as small as it first appears.

The e-mail solicitation for participation was sent to the entire TASSP electronic database. Due to the varied membership of TASSP, one required field in the survey was the position of the respondent. The reason for including this field was to eliminate any respondents who were not secondary school administrators.

Convenience sampling was used for both the quantitative and qualitative portions of the study. A convenience sample is defined by Gall et al. (1996) as a sample that suits the purposes of the study and is convenient to the researcher. As a result, 215 Texas secondary school administrators who chose to respond to the call for participation comprised the sample for this study. All participants were then selected for interviews based upon their willingness to participate. Thirty-one interviewees expressed an interest in a follow-up phone interview. All 31 were sent an e-mail invitation to coordinate a follow-up phone interview. After attempting to coordinate the follow-up phone interview, only six respondents participated in the follow-up interviews.

### **Instrumentation**

The researcher created an electronic survey using the Web-based service Survey Monkey. The survey, which can be found in Appendix A, gathered data on administrator perceptions of cyberbullying in Texas secondary schools, along with demographic information. The survey also contained some open-ended questions that

allowed for more in-depth responses regarding professional experiences related to cyberbullying.

Prior to conducting the actual research survey and interviews, the survey was piloted with 5 secondary school administrators to gain feedback on the construction of the survey and solicit input on the electronic process. In the pilot, the participants were asked for feedback on the organization of the survey, wording of the questions, and ease of understanding. The intent was to ensure the validity and clarity of the instrument so that any issues could be resolved before full distribution. The sample size for the pilot study was small, but the tests provided sufficient information regarding the clarity of the electronic survey. Based on the pilot study, the size of the text boxes was adjusted on the survey instrument, allowing respondents more room for explanations.

When creating the survey, the researcher wanted to ensure that all respondents understood the definition of cyberbullying being used in this research. Therefore, the researcher placed the following brief explanation after the demographic section: “Cyberbullying is defined as a form of bullying that uses technological communications (text or images) to humiliate, harass, embarrass, intimidate, threaten, or slander others (students, teachers, staff).” The respondents were then asked if they were aware of cyberbullying before seeing this definition and whether the definition matched their understanding of cyberbullying.

The first portion of the survey included a demographic section in which school administrators were asked a series of questions related to general information about themselves and the characteristics of their schools. The specific areas covered were the

participant's position, gender, and experience level and information related to grade level, size, and location of their schools. In the second section of the survey, participants were asked about their own professional perceptions of cyberbullying. The specific questions can be found in the copy of survey located in Appendix A.

On June 5, 2009, potential participants received an e-mail from TASSP that gave a brief explanation of the research, a link to the survey, and a comprehensive information sheet about the study. A copy of the e-mail solicitation and information sheet is located in Appendix B. Two hundred fifteen TASSP members responded to the survey. Sixty-nine respondents were eliminated because they were not secondary school administrators leaving one hundred forty six respondents.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

After the data collection from the survey was completed, the survey responses were tabulated. The results were translated from descriptive results into coding formats so that the data could be analyzed. The responses were converted into numerical representations so that the data could be counted and categorized. In the numerical format, the data were placed into spreadsheets so that they were easily manipulated.

The quantitative survey data were entered into the SPSS, a data analysis and statistical software package, for analysis. First, the descriptive information from the survey respondents was categorized according to gender, type of school by grade level, size of school, and location of school. Frequency counts and percentages were calculated according to category. These data were examined to see if there were any

trends or unusual responses in the groups. The rest of the quantitative data were grouped into awareness data, incidence data, and policy data. Frequency counts and percentages were calculated in each of the data groups.

After examining the incidence data, the number, mean, and standard deviation according to the victim type were calculated. The statistical results were examined for differences and trends. Once the frequency counts, means, and standard deviations were determined, analyses were conducted to investigate relationships among the data. The researcher began by examining differences between the genders of the administrators in addressing whether a student or staff member was being cyberbullied using the chi-square test. The researcher then used chi-square tests to examine if differences existed according to grade level in addressing whether a student or staff member was being cyberbullied. To study the relationship between size of school and cyberbullying of students or staff members, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed. An ANOVA was also performed to study the relationship between the location of school and cyberbullying of a student or staff member. If the results attained significance at the .05 level, then a post-hoc test was conducted. For these data, a Scheffé test was used as it is the most conservative of the post-hoc tests. The results were reported using both numerical and graphical techniques, including various tables supplementing and supporting the narrative portion.

To extend understanding of the quantitative data, the open-ended responses and follow-up interviews were analyzed using qualitative analysis methods. This qualitative analysis allowed the researcher to examine perceptions of cyberbullying among the

secondary school administrators participating in the study. By using both quantitative and qualitative research practices, the data became rich with detail, and insights of the participants' experiences on the topic were presented. These rich, descriptive accounts of cyberbullying provided details about the experiences of secondary school administrators.

The analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data followed the principles outlined in *Naturalistic Inquiry* by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The researcher began with the question "To start off our interview, I would like to know how you became involved in the education field." This question was designed to be a broad question to allow the interviewee a chance to relax and talk about their background. The follow-up question asked, "Describe your experience with cyberbullying in detail." To allow for study confirmability, an audit trail was maintained. The audit trail included electronic files of the surveys, audio recordings of interviews, documents, data analysis files, and personal notes.

The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim into Microsoft Word, a word processor format. The transcripts and audiotapes were compared and checked for accuracy. Throughout the interview, the researcher established credibility through member checking (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by asking for clarifications. At the end of the interview, the researcher summarized items for the participant as a final means of providing a member check. This technique is described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as follows: "The member check, whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with



members of those stakeholding groups from whom the data was originally collected, is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314).

Member checking is both formal and informal and is performed throughout the study (Erlandson et al., 1993). The researcher therefore continually checked with those who were interviewed and received feedback on data they provided. In this study, the researcher performed the member checks by summarizing and restating the comments made during the interviews. This process gave the interviewee an opportunity to correct any errors of facts or interpretations. Through these member checks, credibility and trustworthiness were established.

To analyze the qualitative data, a line-by-line review of the transcripts was conducted. As the researcher grouped the data, a cross-case analysis of the interview was used to group answers into categories as described by Dey (1993). These categories became the basis for organizing that data. Analyzing the content of the interviews included identifying, coding, and categorizing patterns in the data (Patton, 1990). Patterns in the qualitative data emerged as the researcher analyzed the data and uncovered themes and meaning in the data. As the researcher became familiar with the patterns in the data, categories were changed or discarded, connections were made, and conclusions were drawn. The commonalities were incorporated to create a description of the perceptions and experiences of secondary school administrators in Texas regarding cyberbullying.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **ANALYSIS OF QUANTITATIVE RESULTS**

The purpose of this study was to gather information about the perceptions and experiences of secondary school administrators in Texas regarding cyberbullying. First, this chapter provides a demographic description of the participants and the participants' descriptions of their perspectives on cyberbullying taken from the survey results. Second, the statistical tests were used to examine the relationships between the gender, type of school, enrollment size and geographic location.

#### **Demographic Data**

Two hundred fifteen secondary school administrators responded to the electronic survey. Sixty-nine respondents were eliminated because they were not secondary school administrators. Therefore, the sample comprised 146 respondents. Gender, type of school according to grade level, size of school, and location of school were addressed as quantitative categorical variables for this study. The data regarding the categorical variables were gathered and reported in Table 2.

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics of Survey Respondents*

category	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Female	67	45.9
Male	79	54.1
Type of school		
Middle school or junior high (6-8)	78	53.4
High school (9-12)	68	46.6
Student enrollment of school		
No more than 300 students	13	8.9
Between 301 and 699 students	32	21.9
Between 700 and 1,000 students	26	17.8
Between 1,001 and 2500 students	54	37.0
Greater than 2,501 students	21	14.4
Geographic location		
Urban	8	5.5
Suburban	79	54.1
Central city	7	4.8
Central city suburban	5	3.4
Independent town	22	15.1
Rural	25	17.1

As seen in Table 2, the gender breakdown of the respondents was balanced between male and female. That is, 54% of the respondents were male and 46% were female. The number of respondents from middle schools or junior high school and high school was also closely balanced. Respondents from middle school or junior high school comprised 53% of the sample, and 47% of the respondents were from high school. The number of survey respondent results from middle school and high school mirrored the actual distribution in Texas public schools at the time, which was 55.8 % in middle school and 44.2 % in high school (Swinkels & Ramirez, 2009).

Regarding the size of the secondary schools, over half of all the responses were from schools with greater than 1,000 students. Initially, this number seemed skewed to the researcher, but after considering the size of schools in the different locations in the state it made more sense. Larger school sizes are frequently found in the major suburban and urban locations. Once the researcher connected the size data with the location data, it became apparent that almost 60% of the respondents in this survey were from the larger suburban or urban schools.

The geographic location of the school was also a categorical variable analyzed in this study. Respondents identified which of the locations provided to them described their school. These classifications were used by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to describe the community served by the school in their snapshot summary tables (Texas Education Agency, 2009). The community categories described the location of the school as follows:

1. *Urban*: School districts serving major metropolitan areas—Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, Fort Worth, Austin, El Paso—and located in counties with populations of 725,000 or more.
2. *Suburban*: School districts in and around the major urban areas.
3. *Central City*: School districts in large Texas cities other than the major metropolitan areas and located in counties with populations between 100,000 and 724,999.
4. *Central City Suburban*: School districts in and around the central city districts.
5. *Independent Town*: School districts in counties with populations of 25,000 to 100,000.
6. *Rural*: School districts that do not meet the criteria in any of the above categories.

Over half of the respondents described themselves as serving a suburban school. This percentage was much larger than the percentage of suburban schools in the state of Texas. According to the snapshot summary tables (Texas Education Agency, 2009), schools in suburban locations make up 23% of the schools in Texas. This larger number of suburban respondents implied to the researcher that the results of this survey are somewhat skewed to the opinions and perceptions of the suburban secondary school administrators.

### Awareness Data

As stated in the survey found in Appendix A, the definition of cyberbullying presented to the respondents was as follows: “Cyberbullying is defined as a form of bullying that uses technological communications (text or images) to humiliate, harass, embarrass, intimidate, threaten, or slander others (students, teachers, staff).” All respondents agreed that this definition matched their own perceptions of cyberbullying. The majority of respondents were very aware of cyberbullying and only 1 respondent was not aware of cyberbullying (Table 3).

Table 3

*Level of Cyberbullying Awareness from Secondary School Administrators Prior to the Survey*

Level of awareness	<i>n</i>	%
Not aware	1	0.7
Somewhat aware	29	19.9
Very aware	116	79.4
Total	146	100.0

When asked whether at least one incident of cyberbullying was addressed by the administrator in their school, 93.8% of the administrators responded affirmatively. The data displayed in Table 4 implied that the majority of secondary school administrators in Texas have experienced an incident of cyberbullying on their campus.

Table 4

*Number of Administrators Who Addressed at Least One Cyberbullying Incident on Their Campus*

Response	<i>n</i>	%
Yes	137	93.8
No	9	6.2
Total	146	100.0

### Policy Data

Respondents were asked if their school districts had cyberbullying policies.

Forty-eight percent of respondents stated that their district had guidelines in place. Of those 70 respondents that had policies in place, 53 (i.e., 76%) felt their district's policy on cyberbullying was sufficient. However, almost 23% of the respondents were completely unaware of their own district's policy on cyberbullying. These data are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

*School District Policy on Cyberbullying*

Cyberbullying policy	<i>n</i>	%
Yes	70	47.9
No	43	29.5
Don't know	33	22.6
Total	146	100.0

### Incidence Data

The distribution of cyberbullying incidents addressed by survey respondents was collected according to the total number of incidents, student incidents, and teacher or staff incidents.

Table 6

*Cyberbullying Incidents Addressed by Administrators According to Incident Victim Type*

Incident victim type	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range
Student	838	5.7	4	5.01	0-25
Teacher or staff	73	0.5	0	1.33	0-10
Total	911	6.2	5	5.33	0-26

As shown in Table 6, respondents reported 911 total incidents in the surveys. The average number of cyberbullying incidents was 6.2, ranging from 0 to 26, and a median of 5. The standard deviation for the total number of incident results was 5.33.

Eight hundred thirty-eight incidents involving students were reported in the surveys. The average number of cyberbullying incidents was 5.7, with 50% of the respondents having no more than 4 incidents (i.e., the median). Of particular interest was the high level of variation in incidents, which ranged from 0 to 25. The standard deviation for the student incident results was 5.01.

Respondents reported 73 incidents involving teachers or staff members. The average number of cyberbullying incidents was .5 per school year, and a median of 0.



The researcher noted the difference in the median for teachers or staff (i.e., 0) and the median for students (i.e., 4). The standard deviation for the teacher or staff member results was 1.33.

Even though the data from the survey indicated that 93.8% of administrators experienced at least one incident of cyberbullying on their campus, administrators felt that cyberbullying had a lower impact than other types of discipline infractions on their campus. Table 7 shows the responses to the level of the impact of cyberbullying in relation to other discipline infractions on campus as perceived by the secondary school administrators surveyed.

Table 7

*Level of Impact of Cyberbullying in Relation to Other Discipline Infractions on Campus According to the Secondary School Administrators Surveyed*

Impact on victims	<i>n</i>	%
No impact	6	4.1
Low impact	134	91.8
Somewhat high impact	5	3.4
Very high impact	1	0.7
Not applicable	0	0

However, the respondents felt that cyberbullying did impact the victims. The distribution of the perceived impact on victims is shown in Table 8.

Table 8

*Level of Impact the Incident Reported Was Perceived to Have on the Victim According to the Secondary School Administrators Surveyed*

Impact on victims	<i>n</i>	%
Virtually none	3	2.1
Minor	55	37.7
Significant	62	42.5
Major	16	10.9
Devastating	4	2.7
Omitted	6	4.1
Total	146	100

The researcher noted that 6 administrators felt that the level of impact of cyberbullying in relation to other disciplinary infractions on campus was “somewhat high impact or high impact,” whereas 82 administrators perceived that the level of impact on the victims was “devastating, major, or significant.” These results indicated that although administrators felt that cyberbullying has a significant impact on the victims, it was not having a high impact in relation to other discipline infractions on the campus.

Administrators felt a responsibility for intervening when students and teachers experienced cyberbullying, as shown in Tables 9 and 10. This responsibility to intervene

is demonstrated by the 95.2% of respondents who stated that they would intervene on behalf of a student on their campus. The majority of respondents (i.e., 95.9%) also felt a responsibility to intervene if a teacher or staff member was being cyberbullied.

Table 9

*Responsibility to Intervene if a Teacher or Staff Member Was Being Cyberbullied*

Responsibility to intervene if a teacher or staff was being cyberbullied	<i>n</i>	%
Yes	140	95.9
No	5	3.4
Omitted	1	0.7
Total	146	100.0

Table 10

*Responsibility to Intervene if a Student Was Being Cyberbullied*

Responsibility to intervene if a student was being cyberbullied	<i>n</i>	%
Yes	139	95.2
No	6	4.1
Omitted	1	0.7
Total	146	100.0

Analyses were conducted to attempt to uncover relationships in the data. Given that a majority of administrators felt that it was important to intervene in cases of cyberbullying, a chi-square test of independence was performed. The results indicated that there was no significant difference by the gender of the administrator in addressing cyberbullying of a student or staff member, as the males and females were similar in their responses,  $\chi^2(1, N = 146) = 0.61, p = .44$ .

Table 11

*One-Way ANOVA Results According to Student Population, Size of School, and Total Number of Incidents Addressed*

Source of variation	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Between groups	272.86	4	68.21	2.498	.045
Within groups	3849.75	141	27.30		
Total	4122.61	145			

No significant differences were found according to grade level in addressing if a student or staff member was being cyberbullied, as middle school or junior high and high school respondents were similar in their responses,  $\chi^2(1, N = 146) = 0.68, p = .41$ .

There was, however, a significant relationship between addressing if a student or staff member was being cyberbullied and the size of the school,  $\chi^2(4, N = 146) = 15.7, p = .003$ . To determine whether statistically meaningful differences existed between the size of the school and the issue addressed, an ANOVA was performed. Table 11 displays the results for this ANOVA.

The one-way ANOVA between the size of the school and the number of cyberbullying incidents is significant at the .05 level. To better understand the differences that exist among the data, a post-hoc Scheffé test was performed for the student population size of school and the issue addressed. These comparisons are appropriate because the ANOVA demonstrated differences among the groups, as seen in Table 11. The results from the Scheffé test are displayed in Table 12. The results showed that statistically significant differences did not exist among these groups (Table 12).

Table 12

*Post-hoc Scheffé Test on Size of Student Population*

(I) Size	(J) Size	$M_{diff}$ (I-J)	SE	$p$	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Less than 300	301-699	-1.87	1.72	.881	-7.23	3.50
	700-1,000	-3.65	1.77	.379	-9.19	1.89
	1,001-2,500	-2.82	1.61	.551	-7.86	2.22
	Greater than 2,501	-5.23	1.84	.096	-10.99	0.52
301-699	Less than 300	1.87	1.72	.881	-3.50	7.23
	700-1000	-1.79	1.38	.794	-6.09	2.52
	1001-2,500	-0.95	1.17	.955	-4.59	2.68
	Greater than 2,501	-3.37	1.47	.266	-7.95	1.21
700-1,000	Less than 300	3.65	1.77	.379	-1.89	9.19
	301-699	1.79	1.38	.794	-2.52	6.09
	1,001-2,500	0.83	1.25	.978	-3.06	4.73
	Greater than 2,501	-1.58	1.53	.900	-6.37	3.20
1001-2,500	Less than 300	2.82	1.61	.551	-2.22	7.86
	301-699	0.95	1.17	.955	-2.68	4.59
	700-1,000	-0.83	1.25	.978	-4.73	3.06
	Greater than 2,501	-2.42	1.34	.522	-6.61	1.78
Greater than 2,501	Less than 300	5.23	1.84	.096	-0.52	10.99
	301-699	3.37	1.47	.266	-1.21	7.95
	700-1,000	1.58	1.53	.900	-3.20	6.36
	1,001-2,500	2.42	1.34	.522	-1.78	6.61

Upon further examination of the data regarding the total number of incidents addressed and the size of the school population, the following observations were noted. Around the student population size of 700 students, the number of cyberbullying incidents addressed increased from a mean of 5.25 in schools with between 301 and 699 students to a mean of 7.04 in schools with between 700 and 1,000 students. The mean decreased to 6.20 in schools with between 1,001 and 2,501 students and increased again to a mean of 8.62 in schools with greater than 2,501 students. Also, a higher percentage of secondary school administrators addressed cyberbullying in schools with between 1,001 and 2,500 students (37.23%).

Table 13

*One-Way ANOVA Results According to Location of School and Total Number of Incidents*

Source of variation	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Between groups	249.52	5	49.90	1.80	.12
Within groups	3,873.09	140	27.66		
Total	4,122.61	145			

An ANOVA was performed to determine whether statistically meaningful differences existed between the location of the school and the total number of incidents addressed. Table 13 displays the ANOVA results for location of school and total number of cyberbullying incidents.

The  $p$  value obtained from the procedure was .12. The one-way ANOVA between the location of the schools and the number of cyberbullying incidents was not statistically significant, meaning that the location of the school was not significant in determining the number of cyberbullying incidents. Comparisons among the groups were not performed because no statistically significant differences existed among those groups (Table 13).



## **CHAPTER V**

### **QUALITATIVE RESULTS**

This study of cyberbullying included both quantitative and qualitative measures of the constructs. The quantitative results were discussed in the previous chapter; this chapter provides information from the qualitative portion of the electronic survey, as well as follow-up interview information. The qualitative data were gathered to answer the following research question: What are the perceptions and experiences of secondary school administrators in Texas regarding cyberbullying?

In the survey, certain questions were designed to elicit qualitative data. Responses to these questions were not required to complete and submit the survey, but they were intended to prompt specific examples or details from the secondary school administrators. One hundred thirty-five of the survey respondents shared their perceptions of a typical incident of cyberbullying.

In addition to the opportunities for giving written comments, the respondent could express willingness to be contacted for a phone interview about personal experiences at the end of the survey. Thirty-one interviewees expressed an interest in answering follow-up questions. All 31 were sent an e-mail invitation, and 6 of those responded and participated in the follow-up personal telephone interview. To maintain confidentiality, the interviewees have been designated Interviewee A, B, C, D, E, and F. The group consisted of 3 male and 2 female assistant principals, as well as 1 female principal, as described in the list below:

1. Interviewee A was a male assistant principal from a suburban high school. His school has a student population of greater than 2,501 students.
2. Interviewee B was a male assistant principal from a central city middle school with a student population of between 700 and 1,000 students.
3. Interviewee C was a female assistant principal from a suburban middle school. Her school has a student population of between 1,001 and 2,500 students.
4. Interviewee D was the only principal in the group. She was from a small rural high school with a student population of between 301 and 699 students.
5. Interviewee E was a male assistant principal. His suburban junior high has a student population of between 1,001 and 2,500 students.
6. Interviewee F was a female assistant principal from a suburban middle school. Her school has a student population of between 1,001 and 2,500 students.

In the electronic survey and the follow-up interviews, respondents were asked to describe typical incidents of cyberbullying they had experienced or witnessed on their secondary school campuses. Of note, the analysis of the 135 survey respondents' written comments and the recordings from the 6 personal interviews revealed that secondary school principals' perceptions of and experiences with cyberbullying were more similar than different regardless of the respondent's sex, the size of the school, or the location of the district. This researcher was able to identify the following themes based on those similarities: (a) common definitions and descriptions, (b) target on individuals, (c) effect on school climate, (d) speed of replication and permanence of information, (e) difference

between public and private information, and (f) need for education. Each of these themes will be discussed in the following subsections.

### **Theme One: Common Definitions and Descriptions**

The first theme illustrates the commonalities in the definitions and descriptions of cyberbullying. The administrators surveyed and interviewed were asked to share experiences in which individual students or teachers were cyberbullied. The following quotes illustrate the commonalities seen in their descriptions of cyberbullying. A male suburban high school principal described cyberbullying as “derogatory statements intent on damaging the reputation and character of another,” whereas a female rural junior high principal described cyberbullying as “posting negative or embarrassing messages or threats publicly.”

“Taking a personal or unflattering picture of someone and posting it to their social network site for mass people to comment on it” was the description given by a male central-city suburban middle school assistant principal. A male independent-town high school principal described cyberbullying as “when a student is passing around ‘sext messages’ of a former girlfriend.” The perspective of a female urban middle school assistant principal was that cyberbullying is “continual texting or calling a person and saying rude or inappropriate comments.” As was true of the majority of responses, there is a hurtful intent in each description. Within this theme, three subthemes emerged: (a) threats, (b) harassment, and (c) humiliation. These categories are consistent with the

themes mentioned in the literature (e.g., Raskausas & Stoltz, 2007). Each of these categories will be discussed with examples from the participants of this study.

### **Threats**

Survey participants reported that students use text messaging, social networking sites, and e-mail to threaten other students with the intention of provoking emotions. “Threats” are defined in the *Merriam-Webster* online dictionary as “an expression of intention to inflict evil, injury, or damage to another person”(“threat,” 2011). One survey respondent discussed a scenario in which a group of girls sent texts to another girl, calling her “snotty and encouraging her to watch out.” Another survey respondent described a student that sent repeated threatening messages through text messaging for days until the victim finally told her parents about the messages. These threats were also posted to social networking sites where other people could see the threats or join in on threatening.

### **Harassment**

Harassment may take different forms. One form is electronically posting images, rumors, or derogatory statements meant to harass individuals. “Harassment” as defined in the *Merriam-Webster* online dictionary is “to annoy persistently to create an unpleasant or hostile situation by uninvited and unwelcome verbal or physical conduct” (“harassment,” 2011). Harassment via derogatory statements may be random or may be sexual, racial, or religious. Some examples included text messages calling the student

names such as a “pimple face” or “bitch.” However, other harassment situations occurred when students posted hurtful comments to their social networking sites for everyone to see or when the students sent these comments to large groups at a time via text messaging.

### **Humiliation**

The third broad category of cyberbullying related to humiliation. In addition to texting and e-mail, the creation of social networking groups or pages has provided a means of humiliating and embarrassing others. The *Merriam-Webster* online dictionary defines “humiliation” as “reducing another person to a lower position” (“humiliation,” 2011). In the present research, examples of both student and teacher humiliation were provided. This humiliation is exemplified in the following scenario reported by Interviewee A about student :

We actually had a group of kids create a Facebook group. It involved a homecoming king nominee. They created a Facebook group to get people to vote for this one particular student and this one particular student really wasn’t very popular, he was actually kind of odd. They wanted people to vote for him as kind of a big joke. And of course the victim in it didn’t really understand that so he thought everyone was voting for him because he was cool and they wanted him to win.

Fifty-seven survey respondents reported that a cyberbully often takes an unflattering or embarrassing photo of another student and then posts it on a social

networking site, allowing others to then begin commenting on a photo. Interviewee C described an instance where a female student had another student take a picture of her in a very skimpy bikini. This photo was then uploaded and sent to another student with the following comments: “You’ll never be as good as me” and “You’re never going to look like this.” Examples like this illustrate how easy it is for students to use electronic mediums to humiliate peers.

Due to the simplicity of recording and modifying digital videos, cyberbullying has progressed into yet another modality. Interviewee B explained that he dealt with a very difficult situation in which a video was taken and posted on YouTube. The video showed an African American student who was being ridiculed and referred to as the “black gorilla.” Interviewee B explained that administrators and parents took swift action. They had the video removed from the site by contacting YouTube and notifying them that the student was a minor and the video was unauthorized. This school administrator explained that even though YouTube staff worked with the parents and school to remove the video, it was a time-consuming process.

The reports from this research demonstrated that cyberbullying did not only occur for students; technology can be used to harass and humiliate teachers as well. Interviewee E stated that:

We actually had a case where a student set up a social networking page and the target was a teacher. Ultimately we found out about it because some students saw the posting and felt bad for the teacher so they reported it to the administration.

Whether the target of cyberbullying is a student or teacher, experiences shared by the secondary school administrators tended to be similar. Until students are made aware of the impact of their technology choices, they will continue to threaten, harass, and humiliate others online.

### **Theme Two: Target on Individuals**

Both survey respondents and interviewees discussed occurrences relating to specific students; none were aimed at groups or cliques such as athletes or nerds. Interestingly, in spite of the focus on individuals and not groups, no trend in targeting a particular gender, sexual orientation, or race emerged in this research. There were no references for cyberbullying perpetrated against groups from any of the respondents or interviewees. It seemed that regardless of demographics, cyberbullying targeted individuals; thus, the quantitative data concerning the impact of cyberbullying on campuses seems to give a different impression than the qualitative comments from survey respondents. Even though quantitative data indicated that the majority of administrators surveyed experienced at least one incident of cyberbullying on their campus, administrators reported that cyberbullying had a fairly low impact on the campus compared to other types of discipline infractions. However, even considering its relative insignificance in comparison to other incidents, comments from survey respondents illustrated the power of cyberbullying to devastate an individual. A survey respondent commented, “Compared to the other discipline problems, this is less violent

but no less disturbing or hurtful to the individual victim.” A female suburban high school assistant principal reported in her survey that:

Most of our cyberbullying cases cause a large rise from students but it is typically over very quickly. There is little “large-scale” residual impact from the incident except for the student who was the victim. The student involved will often work regularly with the counselor to ensure things are better. We have had extremely low repeat incidences to a particular student.

### **Theme Three: Effect on School Climate**

Although the initial incident may have a lingering impact on the individual, the incident may also have an immediate impact on the school climate that a campus administrator would work to resolve. With the wide variety of devices and their increasing capabilities so readily available to students, cyberbullying can occur anywhere a student may be. Students can now cyberbully others at any time, using any number of media to send messages that potentially disrupt the school climate.

The most frequent references to incidents that had the potential to impact school climate described the planning of negative school events. Interviewee C mentioned the use of a social networking site to “name a student to be a target on a particular day at school.” A survey respondent shared, “The messages are threatening, intimidating language played out first with technology and then in person.” Because the school is the location where students come together, the school climate is most likely to be affected. Interviewee D described an incident in which “on the social networking sites, students



were telling each other where they were going to meet for a fight.” Examples from these respondents illustrated some of the ways cyberbullying affects the school day.

Organizing fights and planning the harassment of another student at the school are good examples of the negative impact cyberbullying can have on school climate. When asked about cyberbullying’s impact on the school climate, administrators expressed their concerns about this aspect of cyberbullying, stating that “most of the time these things may start at home. However, students will carry things with them to school and it continues here at school.”

Another survey respondent communicated that he felt that “often these things are affecting the child during the school day or affecting the child’s performance at school.” These types of statements demonstrate how cyberbullying may begin with aggressive language outside of school but culminate in physical confrontation when the students come face-to-face in the hallways or classrooms. Interviewee E explained, “Previous to the Internet and cyberbullying, students would get into arguments or fights about this or that, but now, instead, we are getting fights that occur from what happened online the night before.” This sentiment was echoed by Interviewee F when she stated, “I see kids basically make fun of someone else online or send mean things to them and then the kid comes to school upset or angry.”

Not all disruptions, however, involve fights. Interviewee F described a time when rumors about sexual acts going on at a retail outlet were posted on a social networking site. The nature of the topic and the public venue used to talk about it caused quite a disruption at school the following day. Even though the rumors were

false and the student made up the entire story, the damage was far-reaching. The administrator stated: “I had parents calling about it. They [parents] were asking: ‘How do we make it stop?’” It is clear that although students may not realize the consequences of their online behavior, administrators and parents are concerned about the negative effects. One survey respondent reported that:

We’ve had numerous cases where an event was planned on the social networks. The planned humiliating event was for a student in the cafeteria. A popular boy and his group of friends set up a time in the cafeteria that they went to ask a girl to a dance as a joke. The plan for this was sent on Facebook the night before so many students knew what time it was going to occur in the cafeteria.

This example shows how social media can be used to create a humiliating situation.

The threats, harassment, and humiliation may seem harmless or insignificant when presented from a distance, but emotions can get out of control when the cyberbully and victim meet in person. Those who commented stated that many incidents affecting the school day actually originated outside of school but manifested on campus when the students came face-to-face—for example, a fight in the hallway on the day after a post occurred on a social networking site. Administrators recognized the potential impact of cyberbullying on the campus climate, and they were fully prepared to get involved, as shown by this quote from a survey respondent:

The level of intervention would depend on the circumstances and connection to the school. For example, if the bullying was very disruptive to the school and was being done by a student, the level of intervention would be very high.

Another survey respondent recognized the impact of cyberbullying on the school climate by stating, “Ultimately it will carry over to the school environment.” As technology becomes more influential in students’ lives, administrators sense that cyberbullying will become an increasing concern on the school campus.

#### **Theme Four: Speed of Replication and Permanence of Information**

Cyberbullying began with students using computers to send e-mails or instant messages. As social networking sites became more popular and provided a vehicle for mass communication, cyberbullying incidents multiplied quickly and could occur almost anywhere at any time. Communications spread rapidly, often exponentially, by posting on a social networking site or sending mass messages via a cell phone directory.

Interviewee C described the following:

Cell phones have been . . . an issue for us simply because you can text en masse. And you can send a group text to everybody in your directory and then it can go to everybody in their directory and so on and so forth.

Once a digital file is transmitted to another person, it is easy to share with others and difficult to take back. To the victim, the replication of digital messages feels unremitting. Interviewee E explained that:

Generally speaking, I think it is a lot easier for people to be more frank about the things over a text because it is so impersonal . . . I think that is what has made it easier for students to say what is on their mind without thinking that it is going to be multiplied.

Before such technology was available, students called each other on the phone, wrote notes, or talked in the hallway to plan an event. Now they use text messaging and social networks to spread the information with a click of a button. When students want to communicate with all of their friends quickly and efficiently, they choose electronic media, as described in the previous example of students planning to humiliate another student in the cafeteria. The entire event was orchestrated on a social networking site the night before it occurred.

The ease of mass communication, combined with the advent of new technology, further complicated the issue of cyberbullying. Students were no longer limited to words and could effortlessly post pictures and videos, carrying the threats, harassment, and humiliation to new levels. Having the ability to take and publicly post pictures without permission simply encourages the cyberbully. Interviewee E reported that

They [students] would take a picture of a friend doing something they're not supposed to be doing or that is sexually explicit then forward that . . . picture over to their friend's cell phone. . . . that picture would be passed around from student to student over the cell phones.

Interviewee F expressed frustration in trying to convey to students the magnitude of digital images:

Once you put a picture out there and your face is on it, billions and billions of people have access to that picture. Only after a hurtful incident does a junior high student realize that digital images can be multiplied and manipulated.

The foundation for cyberbullying has always existed; the difference is the developing ease and permanence of digital mass communication. The video recording of the girl who was called a “black gorilla” was meant to humiliate, but the humiliation was compounded by the quick replication of the video, as well as the number of students that viewed and forwarded it. Interviewee B stated that YouTube worked with him to remove the video; however, once someone has a digital copy, the video does not go away. Interviewee C explained the phenomenon well:

Bullying in my estimate has always existed, you know, it has always been there in some form or another. And that a student may have gotten a note written about them, “I don’t like you,” “Your clothes look like they came from Goodwill,” or “You’re horrible.” But that note can be taken up, destroyed, and there are no more copies of it circulating. With the mass media there are so many copies, you can’t even begin to destroy them all. So there’s always some evidence of the bullying around somewhere.

Interviewee F also pointed out that:

I think that kids don’t understand that once something is posted . . . pictures, conversations, quotes, whatever, once you hit submit, you can’t take it back. I mean it is out there forever. It is not like something that you can just put in the paper shredder and destroy.

Secondary school students seem to have difficulty understanding that digital media is essentially permanent. Unfortunately, many of them do not discover the significance of digital media until they have been a victim or a witness to a cyberbullying instance.

### **Theme Five: Difference between Public and Private Information**

During adolescence, it is common for students to build both platonic and romantic relationships (Lerner & Steinberg, 2009). Many of these bonds are short-lived, occurring as students are learning about themselves and the basic tenets of relationships. However, the popularity of communicating through digital media changes the entire dynamic. Administrators shared that students seem to feel safe in building relationships at a distance and are more willing to take risks via text message or on a social networking site. Interviewee C discussed how junior high students are exploring relationships in the secondary school years. By sending text messages or writing that someone is “cute” on a social networking site, teens are experimenting with forming connections. In the course of relationships, students may reveal information assumed to be personal or confidential; however, when one member ends the relationship or betrays the confidence, it can be devastating. The following example demonstrates the way that private information can damage someone’s reputation when it becomes public and also exemplifies the speed of replication and its effect. Interviewee F shared this scenario:

The incident that probably stands out in my mind the most is a break up between a boyfriend and girlfriend. There were pictures that were passed back and forth and shared only between the two. Then once the break up occurred, he decided to share the photos on his social networking site and sent it to his cell phone directory as well. The next day at school we received information about this and it turned out that the photo had gone a whole lot farther than even he thought the

picture would go. I think that he was a little shocked in how quickly it spread as well.

This false sense of security may lead students to make poor choices when it comes to their online behavior. Unlike other mistakes, these types of incidents are difficult to correct. Students seem to live in the present, and they have little comprehension of the future effect of their actions. Interviewee E described the exposure that students face: “A message intended for one recipient and before you know it is being forwarded and forwarded and copied and copied to this person . . . It’s just out there forever.”

### **Theme Six: Need for Education**

This inability of teens to understand the impact of their online behavior shows a need for education, a point brought up by all the interview respondents. Interviewee F stated that:

The middle school age is where I think a foundational understanding needs to be brought in . . . They need to understand that once it is out there you cannot get it back. They need to understand that bullying is bullying whether it is cyberbullying or face-to-face in school bullying.

Along with educating students about cyberbullying and proper online etiquette, some administrators discussed programs already introduced within their schools. Interviewee B described a system on his campus in which teachers and administrators explained the concept of cyberbullying to students. The campus discussed the steps administrators would take against students who chose to treat others disrespectfully

online. The process included a no-bullying contract outlining items that are not tolerated and specific consequences for breaking the contract. Interviewee C also elaborated on the importance of educating students:

One of the things that we've not done very well . . . is really educating our kids about what cyberbullying is, how to recognize it, and how to stop it. If you are sent one of those mass media messages, you know you don't have to send it on.

Although educating students is a primary concern, all interviewees felt that cyberbullying is a topic about which administrators need more information to be more effective in educating students. Administrators want to gather the best practices in this area, and they expressed a desire to educate all the stakeholders. Interviewee F acknowledged that "I think that it's a topic that has to be researched, taught, and worked through so that it can help us be better administrators as well as getting information to parents and to students and the community."

Respondents commonly felt that cyberbullying really started to evolve about 3 to 4 years ago and continues to manifest itself as the technologies change. A sentiment expressed by survey respondents and interviewees was that they wanted to learn how to best handle cyberbullying situations. For example, Interviewee F stated that:

I feel like it is an area that we need to understand better. I do see that it happens more and more, kids coming and saying different things with Twitter, MySpace, Facebook, and things like that so I definitely think that it is an area as an administrator that I want to learn more about and be more familiar with so that I can help counsel my kids.



The need for education was reflected by the fact that administrators feel compelled to help students and reported that they experienced a responsibility to intervene when students experienced cyberbullying, specifically when it affected the school day and student learning. A survey respondent said, “It is my job to help keep the student safe and secure in the school system.” Along with protecting students, administrators felt teachers and staff members also needed their support and clearly indicated that they felt a duty to protect staff members who are targeted by cyberbullying. As one of the respondents pointed out, “One of my responsibilities as an administrator is to support my staff, and this would be an example of an incidence where I would need to do so.” Respondents further emphasized their commitments to protecting students and teachers in statements like the following: “I feel that I need to support and protect staff members from harassment.” One administrator expressed that “I feel a major part of my job is to make sure the students and staff are comfortable and safe on my campus. I think being a victim of cyberbullying would have an effect on them in these areas.”

Administrators are faced with complex questions regarding how to respond to cyberbullying, and no clear solutions exist. This void drives the need for the education of administrators and teachers. School policies provide guidance to administrators with respect to handling any situations that arise. Several states have statutes in regard to bullying, but many do not have ones that specifically include or address cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). The state of Texas passed a statute during the 2011 legislative session; similarly, the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB), which

provides policy to a large percentage of the state's school boards, has a cyberbullying policy recommendation in many district policy manuals (Model Student Code of Conduct, 2010). Even so, federal and state court rulings have not provided a consistent message about how and when schools can intervene (Conn, 2009). Not only is the lack of direction confusing for administrators, but handling and investigating cyberbullying complaints without clear guidelines in place becomes time-consuming and takes them away from other campus responsibilities.

Unlike similar responses to questions regarding cyberbullying experiences on their campuses, results were mixed when respondents were asked about current district policies on cyberbullying. The answers ranged from a belief that policies were adequate to concerns that policies needed to be constantly revised and updated to stay current. One respondent commented that although an adequate policy on cyberbullying existed, he felt it was more important to work on relationships within the school and the overall school climate rather than refine policies.

Administrators also believed that by collaborating with others who have more experience with cyberbullying, a more proactive plan to serve their student populations could be established. Interviewee B stated that:

Learning how to effectively handle these situations . . . would be particularly helpful for me and then if I was able to provide any information on how we've handled it and then collaborate with other professionals who've handled these instances, maybe we could come up with a more proactive and better plan.

Given the number of students engaging in digital communication and using social networking sites, administrators must be able to recognize cyberbullying and develop strategies for educating students about its damaging effects. Through education, these skills will be developed.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS**

This mixed method study was designed to describe administrators' knowledge of cyberbullying by exploring their perceptions and experiences. The study sought to gather quantitative information related to cyberbullying in secondary school campuses in Texas, as well as descriptive details from the qualitative portion of the survey and the follow-up interviews. Gathering both numerical and descriptive data about cyberbullying helps formulate ways to respond to incidents. As a result, increasing knowledge about cyberbullying can help create programs and policies to address cyberbullying. With digital communication the preferred mode of interaction among adolescents (Lenhart et al., 2010), understanding the issue of cyberbullying has become critical. The present study was designed to answer the question: What are the perceptions and experiences of secondary school administrators in Texas regarding cyberbullying?

The qualitative survey questions and the follow-up interviews generated rich data about the cyberbullying incidents that secondary school administrators responded to in their schools. The quantitative survey questions provided numerical data about cyberbullying from the perspective of secondary school administrators in Texas. This chapter will present a summary of the study's findings and conclusions as they relate to the literature. The research implications and suggestions for future research will also be discussed.

Six themes emerged from the qualitative survey questions and interviews: (a) common definitions and descriptions, (b) target on individuals, (c) effect on school climate, (d) speed of replication and permanence of information, (e) difference between public and private information, and (f) need for education. The first theme, common definitions and descriptions, illustrated the commonalities seen in the definitions and descriptions of cyberbullying. Factors such as location, size, and gender were considered to identify any trends in the data. During this examination of the data, three subthemes arose within the common definitions and descriptions theme: (a) threats, (b) harassment, and (c) humiliation. Research on traditional bullying found that bullying involves an intention to harm and a power differential between the bully and target (Nansel et al., 2003). In direct forms of bullying, this power differential is often obtained with physical strength or group intimidation (Olweus, 1993). Because there is no physical presence in cyberbullying, cyberbullies often gain power and control over their target through humiliation (Beran & Li, 2005). This research study also found that administrators perceived humiliation as one form of cyberbullying.

The second theme, target on individuals, detailed how all the survey respondents and interviewees described instances of cyberbullying perpetrated against individuals as opposed to groups of students. Interestingly, cyberbullies do not appear to choose victims according to their clique or status within the peer group. Research by Smokowski & Kopasz (2005) found that an individual may be victimized due to a physical difference or intellectual ability. Although all examples given in the present

study were about cyberbullying instances directed toward a specific individual, no specific type of victim could be generalized from the accounts.

The third theme, effect on school climate, discussed the impact of cyberbullying on the campus climate. Though not as prevalent as other discipline infractions on a school campus, research participants in this study illustrated that a cyberbullying incident may have a short-lived effect on overall campus environment but can have a profound and lasting effect on the targeted individual. Blair (2003) explained that cyberbullying may occur outside of school, but the consequences may arise on the school campus the next day. The present research included various examples of this phenomenon; Interviewee E provided the following illustration: “Previous to the Internet and cyberbullying, students would get into arguments or fights about this or that, but now, instead, we are getting fights that occur from what happened online the night before.” The body of research focusing on the effects of cyberbullying and the school climate is not large; however, studies of victims of bullying reported that if the situation is going unnoticed at school, they are less likely to feel safe in that environment (Casey-Cannon, Hayward, & Gowen, 2001; J. Yoon & Kerber, 2003). Creating a school climate where students feel safe to report bullying and cyberbullying is imperative for addressing the issue.

The fourth theme, speed of replication and permanence of information, demonstrated how digital communication can multiply and remain online indefinitely, continuing to impact the victim. With the convenience of technology comes the ubiquity of its use. This finding is consistent with other research that shows cyberbullying can

reach a large audience very quickly (Li, 2006; Slonje & Smith, 2008) and can transcend time and place (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Because cyberbullying can be distributed quickly to a wide audience, it can increase the victimization felt by a targeted individual (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Willard (2006) noted that cyberbullying posts can be broadcast on a worldwide forum and are often irretrievable, creating a feeling that one cannot escape from the abuse. Along with the speed of replication, the permanence of digital information has an impact on this inescapable feeling that victims of cyberbullying face. Research by Campbell (2005) found that cyberbullying is different than bullying because of the permanence of the digital written word or picture that students may have to experience over and over again. In contrast, bullying can be severe at the time of the incident, but the verbal words or memories of the event typically dissipate over time.

The fifth theme, differences between public and private information, revealed how private information or images can harm individuals when they become public. Because of their inexperience, students are not prepared to understand the full impact or permanence of technology. The respondents in this study suggested that digital media has made bullying much more public than any other previous generation experienced. Although today's digital devices make proactive communication easier, they can also be used to capture others in humiliating or compromising situations (Stover, 2006). The practice of posting such images on a relatively public venue such as a social networking site adds to the embarrassment and leads to unavoidable humiliation for the victim. With traditional bullying, when a student was harassed or called names, the verbal

humiliation was confined to those present and ended once the victim walked away from the group. When a student posts humiliating comments or pictures about another student on a social networking site or through text messaging, however, it is just the beginning of the humiliation. Once the digital item is posted, it becomes accessible to others. By the time inappropriate comments or postings are reported and removed, the damage has been done. Regrettably, these postings are not limited to secondary school peers or those who actually know the victim. The implications for secondary school administrators are that the basic awareness of cyberbullying needs to be expanded.

The sixth theme, need for education, stated that students and administrators need more information about cyberbullying and the correct ways to respond. Information is the key to creating successful programs with cyberbullying. There needs to be an increase in student, parent, and educator awareness about cyberbullying. Just as parents and educators are vital to communication about this issue, it is also important to get the information out to the general public. Recently, MTV developed a campaign entitled “A Thin Line” to help teens identify, respond to, and discourage cyberbullying. The name of this campaign originated from what seems to be a “thin line” between what may have originated as a joke but developed into a significant issue with adverse effects. Part of the key to teaching students about cyberbullying is encouraging venues like MTV that are geared toward a teen audience to promote appropriate digital communication. K. Brown et al. (2006) discussed how the seemingly limitless boundaries of cyberbullying creates a challenge for educators and policymakers as they attempt to formulate ways to respond to all the aspects of cyberbullying.



Results of the quantitative portion of this study indicate that incidents of cyberbullying have appeared in the majority of secondary schools in Texas. This finding corresponds with other research demonstrating that cyberbullying is occurring among secondary school students. In most studies, the rates of cyberbullying for adolescents ranged from approximately 10% to 35% according to how the behavior was measured and the way in which the study was designed (Agatson et al., 2007; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Kowalski & Limber 2007; Li, 2007a, 2007b; Williams & Guerra, 2007). In contrast, some other research studies found that the rate of cyberbullying was much higher (Berarducci, 2009; Li, 2007b). Li (2007b) found that over half of the students surveyed knew a victim of cyberbullying. Berarducci (2009) reported that only a few students identified their roles in cyberbullying; however, as many as 72% of students surveyed had heard of cyberbullying occurring between students from their high school. This finding suggested that cyberbullying is a problem among students. Due to the process of self-reporting and students' lack of understanding, however, it is difficult to ascertain the exact percentages of students experiencing cyberbullying. Lenhart (2007) suggested providing a definition of cyberbullying in the instrument used to measure the rate of incidents. This notion was supported by Beran and Li (2005), who felt that providing the definition would help research participants decide if their experiences met the criteria of an incident of cyberbullying. Regardless, the present research study and the literature suggest that cyberbullying is occurring. To address this issue, schools should develop and find effective solutions to cyberbullying. The solutions need to encompass both proactive and reactive elements, such as incorporating positive uses of

technology in the school setting, as well as explaining the steps necessary to handle cyberbullying when it has occurred. Administrators and students should also discuss the impact of cyberbullying and come together to design and implement effective long- and short-term solutions. Therefore, it is important for administrators, educators, parents, and students to understand what cyberbullying is and how to act in response.

The findings of the present study regarding the number of cyberbullying incidents showed that cyberbullying is 11 times more prevalent against secondary school students than teachers and staff members. In this study, 838 cyberbullying incidents were reported involving students, along with an additional 73 incidents involving teachers and staff members. A possible cause of this difference between students and teachers may be that students use digital media more frequently for communication than most adults. As a result, students tend to have more exposure to both technology's positive and negative aspects. A second possible reason for the difference in the student results may be that secondary school students are just developing their skills relating to establishing and maintaining friendships and romantic relationships (Lerner & Steinberg, 2009). Because many cyberbullying incidents tend to involve relationship challenges, some aspects of cyberbullying may be a simple result of adolescent psychological development. Students in secondary schools today are immersed in technology; it is imbedded in their everyday lives, so it is only logical that they would turn to this comfortable outlet when dealing with the normal conflicts of developing and building relationships, as well as finding their places among their social groups.

Almost 23% of the respondents were completely unaware of their own district's policy on cyberbullying. This finding is of concern because it is important for secondary school administrators to understand the legal parameters regarding cyberbullying. Researchers are encouraging school districts to have policies in place that allow schools to discipline students who commit cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011). These researchers also encourage a comprehensive acceptable use policy for technology that parents and students sign each year. Schools should work to create an effective plan to incorporate these items into their policies and practices. McKenzie (1995) pointed out that board policy should address what schools should do when students, teachers, staff, and administrators are confronted with unacceptable online behaviors such as cyberbullying. Respondents in the present study echoed the same sentiment in their comments. In addition, a review of legislative policies according to state was conducted (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010); several laws have been proposed or enacted on the state and federal level to address online behaviors. As the proposed legislation takes effect, school administrators must know the laws regarding cyberbullying and their role in implementing the regulations.

The results of the present survey determined that the gender of the school administrators who handled the cyberbullying incident was not significant, and there were no significant differences between the findings regarding male and female administrators. Previous researchers argued that men and women differ in the way that they approach discipline incidents in the educational leadership role (Butterfield & Grinnell, 1999; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly, Karau, & Johnson, 1992; Eckman, 2004;

Reay & Ball, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1989); however, significant differences were not found in the number of cyberbullying incidents that either gender responded to in this research. Although this research suggested that administrators of both genders are responding to cyberbullying incidents, a different type of research study on cyberbullying may reveal differences between the genders. The present research did not examine the methods and approaches used by the administrators.

The size of the school in which the cyberbullying occurred was significant in this research. Smaller schools had less cyberbullying. Although this researcher was unable to find other research on cyberbullying to support this assertion, there is mixed evidence in the literature about school size and bullying. Several studies in the literature stand in direct contrast to the notion that school size improves the climate. These research studies did not find a significant correlation between school enrollment size and victimization such as bullying (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 1985; Klein & Cornell, 2010; Olweus, 1993; Whitney & Smith, 1993). In order to gather more information about school size researchers should look at different aspects of cyberbullying in relation to school size.

Administrators surveyed in the current study overwhelmingly felt a responsibility to intervene for both students (95.2%) and teachers (95.9%) when cyberbullied. Atlas and Pepler's (1998) research about traditional bullying found that teachers were more likely to intervene than peers. The research study by Atlas and Pepler (1998) suggested that teachers were more likely to intervene because teachers perceived classroom management as their responsibility. It is not known whether the responsibility to

intervene felt by secondary school administrators in this study relates to administrators' responsibility for overseeing classroom management as well as campus discipline management.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

As an educator, I have always been concerned with the social–emotional aspect of education. When I became a junior high assistant principal, this interest in students' social–emotional needs translated into a focus on educating others about bullying issues in schools. As I researched and created programs to address bullying, I noticed a lack of studies on the relatively new topic of cyberbullying. None of the studies I read concerning cyberbullying gathered perceptions from secondary school administrators. Because there was a gap in the literature about school administrator's perceptions on cyberbullying, the idea for this research project formed.

This study could be extended by conducting a similar study to gather the perspectives of the school counselors in secondary schools. Although the present study focused on Texas secondary school administrators' perceptions and experiences of cyberbullying, more research is needed to examine the perspectives of others, such as counselors, parents, and teachers. Counselors could provide a different, but valuable angle on this issue. A study that used open-ended interviews with counselors who worked through the incidents with the students could give the researcher rich data to formulate conclusions about different viewpoints on the issue of cyberbullying. Although researchers have already begun examining the student perspective, these other

groups, which serve important roles in the lives of students, have received very little attention.

The media has documented the devastating consequences caused by cyberbullying. Recently, the *New York Times* (Hoffman, 2010) and *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (Winfrey, 2010) devoted coverage to the subject. Because cyberbullying is being discussed in the national news, it is necessary to gather information about cyberbullying from a nationally represented sample and to include other grade levels, environments, and perspectives. Therefore, research studies designed to study different aspects of cyberbullying would enhance the literature.

Because the issue of cyberbullying seems to have grown in the past few years, the amount of research will likely increase. As researchers gather more information, more educational programs will likely be developed and implemented. Once in effect, these programs need to be evaluated for effectiveness so that they can be improved and become part of the solution.

Currently, the complex questions regarding responding to cyberbullying have no clear answers. Even the issue of who has the authority to deal with cyberbullying presents conflict. Several states have statutes in regard to bullying, but many do not specifically include or address cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). As local, state, and federal lawmakers address the issue, a study comparing the success of these policies would elicit interesting data that might assist in making programs stronger and more effective.

Although some researchers assert that more peer victimization occurs at larger schools (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1996), other researchers seem to contradict these findings (Klein & Cornell, 2010). Because the results of this study show that the size of the school was significant, a study specifically examining the size of school and the number of cyberbullying incidents could elicit informative data that would enable programs to be tailored to a school's needs to a greater extent. The findings from these studies could be used to support policies and practices in schools and school districts.

A final recommendation for further study is the area of cyberbullying against faculty and staff. While respondents in this study reported 73 incidents of cyberbullying directed toward faculty, no studies addressing this issue was found in the literature. A clearer understanding of the use of cyberbullying by adults or students and directed toward teacher and staff are needed.

### **Steps School Districts Should Take**

The integration of technology into our schools is essential in reaching today's students. Tools are constantly changing, and educators must guide students toward the constructive use of media such as social networking. As we embrace new teaching methods, we must also be proactive in preparing students, parents, teachers, and administrators to understand both the negative and positive aspects of the digital environment. To help schools successfully incorporate positive uses of technology in

our classrooms and campuses, certain steps should be taken to prevent and handle cyberbullying. School districts should:

1. Develop effective prevention programs and strategies to educate students, educators, and parents about cyberbullying and online etiquette.

Even though it seems that more curriculum is constantly being added to the school day, it is imperative that we educate our students, parents, teachers, and school administrators about appropriate use of technology. Cyberbullying and its damaging capabilities should be part of this education effort. Along with the knowledge of what constitutes cyberbullying, students should realize that there can be negative consequences for both the cyberbully and the victim. Establishing and reinforcing clear expectations for digital communication are paramount to creating a positive school climate built on respect and integrity.

2. Guide and support students in making constructive use of technology.

Because our world is increasingly digital, educators must capitalize on their students' desires to utilize technology. Class blogs and wikis can be used for classroom communication. Distance learning and partnering with other classes around the nation or world provides students with more diverse cultural perspectives. Also, teachers can capture students' natural familiarity with technology by allowing them to design online tutorials. Examples and illustrations given from a peer's perspective are often different from those shared by an adult, and this use of technology may enhance a struggling student's ability to grasp a concept. The more technology a teacher can integrate into



the classroom, the more students will develop appropriate online etiquette and become more educated digital users.

3. Develop a responsible use policy that addresses cyberbullying.

Not only should we teach our students how we want them to behave when using digital technology, we should clearly spell out our expectations. Training and information on cyberbullying should be provided to all stakeholders in the school district. Many school districts require students to sign a responsible use policy, present parents and students with a guide on cyberbullying and appropriate online uses of technology, and have teachers complete a mandatory online training related to social networking and digital technologies. Of course, following these steps and developing these policies does not mean that issues related to cyberbullying will instantly disappear, but the creation of policy delineates how cyberbullying incidents will be handled at school. School administrators should work with parents and students to convey that cyberbullying is unacceptable and that the behavior will result in discipline.

4. Begin or coordinate an effort to collect data on cyberbullying incidents so that policies can be developed to address the issue.

To develop successful policies regarding cyberbullying, schools and school districts need to collect data on cyberbullying incidents. By examining what is currently happening in schools and evaluating how issues are addressed, policies to identify underlying problems and appropriate responses can be developed and adjusted.

## **Conclusion**

The use of technology for communication has transformed our society.

Adolescents no longer meet solely in public venues to “hang out” or visit with their friends. Instead, adolescent students congregate online in virtual environments through their computers and cell phones. It is the duty of all those involved in the welfare of our youth, whether parents, educators, or community members, to demonstrate appropriate behavior and guide them toward wise technological choices. Cyberbullying is a cruel and dangerous application of our most common digital technologies, and we must be proactive rather than reactive in trying to control it. We cannot blame the technology; we have to deal with the issues technology has created. We must be alert to evidence of cyberbullying, evaluate our experiences and the underlying causes, devise appropriate responses, and incorporate this into an ongoing anticyberbullying campaign. Using technology to communicate is a part of students’ everyday lives. The benefits of mastering this type of communication outweigh the risks of harmful possibilities. As educators, it is incumbent on us to emphasize the positive and control the negative aspects.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**SURVEY**

**Perceptions of Cyberbullying from Secondary School Administrators in Texas**

**1. What is your current position?**

- ☐ Principal
- ☐ Assistant Principal
- ☐ Other

**2. Gender:**

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

**3. What level of secondary school do you serve?**

- ☐ Middle/Junior High (6-8)
  - ☐ High School (9-12)
  - ☐ Other
- If other, please specify.

**4. How long have you served in this position?**

Enter number of years: \_\_\_\_\_

**5. How many years have you been in the education profession-in any position?**

Enter number of years: \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Which of the following best describes the size of your school?**

- ☐ Less than 300 students
- ☐ 301-699 students
- ☐ 700-1000 students
- ☐ 1001-2500 students
- ☐ Greater than 2501 students

**7. Which of the following describes the location of your school?**

- ☐ Urban (School districts serving major metropolitan areas – Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, Fort Worth, Austin, El Paso – and located in counties with populations of 725,000 or more.)
- ☐ Suburban (School districts in and around the major urban areas.)
- ☐ Central City (School districts in large Texas cities other than the major metropolitan areas and located in counties with populations between 100,000 and 724,999)
- ☐ Central City Suburban (School districts in and around the central city districts.)
- ☐ Independent Town (School districts in counties with populations of 25,000 to 100,000.)
- ☐ Rural (School districts that do not meet the criteria in any of the above categories.)

**8. Were you aware of cyberbullying before this questionnaire?**

- ☐ Not Aware
  - ☐ Somewhat Aware
  - ☐ Very Aware
-

*Cyberbullying is defined as a form of bullying that uses technological communications (text or images) to humiliate, harass, embarrass, intimidate, threaten or slander others.*

**9. Does this definition match your definition of cyberbullying?**

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

**10. Keeping in mind that cyberbullying can be directed towards, students, teachers, and staff members, have you had to address at least one incident of cyberbullying in your school during the 2008-2009 school year?**

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

**11. Please briefly describe what you see as a typical incident of cyberbullying.**

**12. How many incidents of cyberbullying have had to be addressed in your school during this school year?**

Enter number of incidents: \_\_\_\_\_

**13. In how many incidences was a teacher or other school staff the object of the bullying?**

Enter number of incidents: \_\_\_\_\_

**14. In how many cyberbullying incidences was a student the object of the bullying?**

Enter number of incidents: \_\_\_\_\_

**15. If you have had to address one or more incidents of cyberbullying, what average level of impact would you say that the "incident(s)" have had on the "victims"?**

- ☐ Virtually none  
☐ Minor  
☐ Significant  
☐ Major  
☐ Devastation

**16. In relation to other types of discipline infractions on your campus, how significant is the impact of cyberbullying during the 2008-2009 school year?**

- ☐ Very high impact
- ☐ Somewhat high impact
- ☐ Low impact
- ☐ No impact
- ☐ N/A

**17. If you became aware that a student was being cyberbullied, would you feel a responsibility to intervene?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Comments:

**18. If you became aware that a staff member was being cyberbullied, would you feel a responsibility to intervene?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Comments:

**19. Does your school district have a written policy on cyberbullying?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't Know

**20. If you answered "yes" to question 19, do you think that your current policy on cyberbullying is sufficient to address the cyberbullying that has occurred in your school and/or district?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't Know/Undecided

**21. If you would be willing to be interviewed further over the telephone or in person, please provide your personal contact information.**

Name:

School:

School Address:

Address 2:

City/Town:

State:

ZIP/Postal Code:

Email Address:

Phone Number:

## **APPENDIX B**

### **INFORMATION SHEET**

#### Perceptions of Cyberbullying from Secondary School Administrators in Texas

##### **Introduction**

The purpose of this form is to provide you (as a prospective research study participant) information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research.

You have been asked to participate in a research study about cyberbullying. The purpose of this study is examining the perceptions of cyberbullying from secondary school administrators. You were selected to be a possible participant because of your membership in Texas Association of Secondary School Principals.

##### **What will I be asked to do?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete an electronic survey that takes less than 10 minutes. If desired, you may provide your contact information for follow-up questions.

**What are the risks involved in this study?**

The risks associated with this study are minimal, and are not greater than risks ordinarily encountered in daily life.

**What are the possible benefits of this study?**

You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, the results of this survey can be used to add to the literature on cyberbullying.

**Do I have to participate?**

No. Your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without your current or future relations with Texas A&M University being affected.

**Who will know about my participation in this research study?**

The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only Kris Mitzner will have access to the records.

**Whom do I contact with questions about the research?**

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Kris Mitzner, 713-447-2304, [kmitzner@tamu.edu](mailto:kmitzner@tamu.edu)

**Whom do I contact about my rights as a research participant?**

This research study has been reviewed by the Human Subjects' Protection Program and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact these offices at (979)458-4067 or [irb@tamu.edu](mailto:irb@tamu.edu).

**Participation**

Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions and received answers to your satisfaction. If you would like to be in the study, please begin the survey by clicking on the link in the email.



## **APPENDIX C**

### **EMAIL SOLICITATION**

This is a short survey for a research study about cyber bullying. The purpose is to examine cyber bullying from the perspective of secondary school administrators in Texas. It should take less than 10 minutes to complete. Click on this link to begin the survey:

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=59Q4GYGMR4tmelZ4mEhfrg\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=59Q4GYGMR4tmelZ4mEhfrg_3d_3d)

If you would like more information about this research study, please click on the link below:

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=41byoVZntezJW\\_2biFDF1G\\_2bg\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=41byoVZntezJW_2biFDF1G_2bg_3d_3d)

**APPENDIX D**  
**FOLLOW-UP QUESTION**

Follow-up question to be used:

- 1) Describe your experience with cyberbullying in detail.

**VITA**

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